

For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.

Psalm 36:9

the LifeWord *—*

with Michael Green



May 15, 2009

Dear Friend:

RUSTY, R.I.P.

This week we lost the fifth member of our family when *"Rusty the Guinea Pig"* moved to Heaven.

Rusty lived with us for almost four years and was a great source of amusement and fun until he took sick a few days ago. Rusty had come to us at a very important time and his leaving left a sad spirit in our house.

His arrival was quite eventful on many levels. Let me explain...When Tyler was just a small toddler he reached down to pet a supposedly friendly dog. He was rewarded with a bite to the face. Today, if you look real close between his eye and the top of his chubby cheek, you can still see a fang scar courtesy of the dumb cur. Understandably, a fear of animals, especially of dogs, gripped him for many years.

Things started changing in 2004 when we spent time with some friends who were involved in the training of *"Seeing Eye Dogs"*. When we got to their house, he was very tentative but the sweet, friendly Lab lumbered out and right then decided that Tyler would be his buddy. By the time we left, they looked like Timmy and Lassie but the caution was not completely lifted and then we had that stupid storm to deal with. Fortunately, our evacuation home in Memphis had another lovable canine that continued to help break the ice.

When Linda and the boys moved back from San Antonio, our lives, like most families, were upside down and Tyler's spirits were especially low but a miracle happened across the street.

Turns out, Tyler's buddy, Kyle, announced that they had apparently not kept their two guinea pigs as separated as had been originally thought and that they now had a crowded cage.

Tyler took a fancy to the most unusual looking one in the group. He didn't have the typical rodent look. He had shocks of long, wild hair in every direction. A quick Google told us that he was a Peruvian, long haired guinea pig. After seeing all of the *"big hair"*, Linda laughingly said it was a sign from God and Rusty moved in. Rusty had a kind nature and, in moments, he won our hearts and helped finish off that animal fear thing.

The clump of walking hair always elicited a smile or a *"what is that"* from visitors. Lying on the floor, he looked like a bad hairpiece or a cross between Art Garfunkel and Cousin It.

As with most house pets, the promised care of said animal belongs to the kid but gradually ends up in Mom's lap. Our house was no exception and Linda spoiled him big time. No dull, boring pig pellets for this guy as he soon developed a taste for the boxed organic lettuce, with sliced apple and carrot treats to jazz up the pellets. Then there was the hair care; it had to be cut on a regular basis followed by a good combing. Life was good.

Soon, to get more snacks, as Linda would walk by his cage, he would do a whistle that sounded like a fingers to the mouth whistle. His early morning attention ritual, the kicking of his dish around the cage, was designed to get breakfast going as soon as possible.

He certainly was comedic relief but a few days ago, we noticed something was not right. He had been sick about 7 months before and had recovered strong but now, he wasn't springing back.

After finding a vet that treated exotic pets, we got the news he was in rough shape. Two or three things were going wrong at once. We just didn't need this right now.

Knowing Tyler's concern, we all tried our best to get him better. It wasn't unusual to see six foot Geoff sprawled on the floor feeding him a treat or scratching under his chin. Still, his response was not normal.

For those last few nights, Linda sat him on her lap and hand fed him. He snuggled a bit but the whistle was gone. After four days in the hospital and a surgery to save him, Rusty faded away.

On Friday afternoon, I went to the Animal Hospital to pick up the small box with *"Rusty Green"* written on the top and headed home. We dug a small hole in the corner of the backyard and at dusk we walked to the spot. Tyler carried out the box and, together, we carefully laid it down. We stopped and thanked God for the joy Rusty had brought to our house and then we covered up the hole.

Why am I telling you all this? Just because. And because there is a real story here.

To the more spiritual ones out there in TV Land, the Word is clear...*"Every good gift comes from God"*. Rusty was a good gift and God taught us a lesson at the same time. The same God, who concerns himself with all the business of the universe, right down to the adornment of our flowers, seems to have a soft spot for a kid's pet.

Yeah, even a long haired Guinea Pig who helped transform a frightened boy into a confident young man, who now shows joy and affection for all kinds of animals, is a God Gift.

Over the last few days, all four of us have caught ourselves looking at the spot in the backyard and we all know one thing, fear was finally broken because of our furry friend.

Just know God can use the simplest of things to burst through that which seems so scary and complicated. Even in our darkest, most fearful time, we can receive a surprise blessing from an unexpected source that will bring life and joy. God is good and He just loves to work that way.

Keep looking, keep faithful, you'll find it.

Michael

